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ABSTRACT

The questions of if and how writing in a second language is the same as writing in the first were investigated in a review of the literature. After a review of research in first language (L1) composing since Emig's 1971 "composing aloud" study, research in second language (L2) composing is also examined. Studies on the relationship between L1 and L2 composing includes both children in bilingual programs and adult subjects. It is concluded that, given the current data in L1 and L2 composing processes, the question of similarity between the two cannot be answered with any certainty. In general, studies of child and adult composers show a high transfer of composing skills from the L1 into L2 composing. However, it is clear that research in the composing process of native English speakers writing in English is not always generalizable to non-native English-speaking writers. Contains 33 references. (LB)

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Is the Process of Composing in a Second Language Similar to Composing in the First?

MICHELE MORAGNE e SILVA

First language (L1) composing processes have been investigated considerably in the last fifteen years. Application of this research has been influential in restructuring writing classes and texts, as well as in reevaluating assumptions of good writers' behavior. Perhaps as an outcome of this renewed interest in how and what good writers compose, schools and universities have placed increasing emphasis on fundamental writing ability on writing exams.

More than 343,000 foreign students currently study in American universities (N.E.A, 1987). Additionally, a large number of immigrant and refugee students help to make a significant percentage of students for whom English is not their native or first language. These students must also demonstrate proficiency in writing in English and usually enroll in at least one composition course specifically designed to help second language (L2) students improve their writing in English. Unfortunately, a large body of L2 composing process research does not yet exist and many ESL composition courses and texts have been designed with little attention given to theoretical issues unique to L2 composers. As Krashen notes, "while reasonable suggestions have been made on the basis of first language research, empirical investigation is lacking" (1984: 38).

Empirical studies in second language composing are not lacking; most of them, however, are unpublished and many are still in progress. One of the most important issues these studies attempt to investigate is if and how writing in a second language is the same as writing in the first. This overview of relevant literature in first and second language composing processes attempts to answer this research question: Is the process of composing in a second language similar to composing in a first language?

Research in First Language Composing

Research in the nature of the composing process has been extensive since Emig's influential "composing aloud" study of eight twelfth graders in 1971. Emig found that composing was a

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non-linear process characterized by frequent attempts to discover meaning. Later work by Perl (1980) and Sommers (1980) confirmed the recursive process of writing, showing that writers move backwards in order to move forward in their writing. Often this is done to regain a "felt sense" of their intended meaning and even to discover new meaning.

The work of Flower and Hayes (1981) introduced a theory and model of the cognitive processes involved in writing based on "thinking-aloud" protocol analysis. Four major points of their theory show that writing is made up of a set of distinctive thinking processes; these processes have a hierarchical, embedded organization; composing is a goal-oriented thinking process; and, writers create these goals by generating new goals or changing previous goals based on what they have learned through writing. The Flower and Hayes model of composing processes presents composing as made up of three major components, including the task itself, the writer's long term memory (LTM) and specific cognitive composing processes. In addition, a Monitor is used in moving from one component area to another. The task includes the rhetorical problem and the text produced so far; LTM includes the writer's knowledge of such things as topic, audience and writing plans; and the important composing processes include planning, translating and reviewing. Within planning are the subprocesses of generating, organizing and goal setting. Likewise, reviewing includes the subprocesses of evaluating and revising.

Although Flower and Hayes' model of composing has attained wide acceptance and recognition, there have been numerous attempts by other researchers to create new models of composing. One such attempt has been presented by de Beaugrande (1984). His parallel stage interaction model represents composing as a complex but not chaotic process including multiple internal/affective variables and external/environmental variables. His model allows constant interaction among various levels of skills involved in composing. The continuum of skills moves from the lowest level of coordinating sounds and letters, to using phrases, developing concepts, and eventually to the highest level of representing goals.

Although most research on the writing process deals with metacomponents or cognitive processes involved in writing such as planning and strategy use, processes involved in performance have also been explored. Scardamalia, Bereiter and Goelman

(1982) have examined performance components which are used in actual production, incorporating a writer's psychological system and affecting the writer's use of his/her knowledge base. Scardamalia et al. note that production factors such as speed of memory searches, short term memory (STM) limitations, and the demands for attention on STM can affect cognitive processes in writing. Significantly, a writer's ability to "find" the right information at the right time and to remember high-level goals and intentions may be dependent solely on production factors.

Bracewell (1982) feels that it is often not a lack of skills that produces poor writing but an inability or unawareness of using existing skills in new ways. This is especially true for children learning to write who are also moving from oral to written modes. Bracewell feels that metacognition is important in applying tacit knowledge of communication strategies in a deliberate manner, such as is required in composing.

Much of the earlier work in composing processes examined the writing behavior of skilled vs. unskilled writers. Most researchers have concluded that unskilled writers tend more to low-level linguistic concerns at the expense of high-level conceptual matters. Pianko (1979) observed that remedial writers hesitated often when concerned about spelling, and as opposed to traditional freshman writers, they only infrequently scanned their writing to evaluate produced texts and direct future evolving text. Perl (1979) studied unskilled writers and found that a great majority of revisions or changes in their writing were linguistic and not content related. Although she described their composing behavior as recursive and deeply embedded, the unskilled writers' concern over editing often interrupted this process.

Research in Second Language Composing

Research in English as a second language (ESL) writing is quite limited and has dealt almost exclusively with written and pedagogical considerations. The preoccupation with written product in the ESL field may reflect the traditional assumption that L2 writing is speech written down (Buckingham, 1979) and that, at least in early stages of instruction, writing is a valuable method for testing and correcting L2 acquisition.

The work of Robert B. Kaplan (1966, 1967, 1976) and others in the field of Contrastive Rhetoric has developed through the analysis of L1 and L2 written products. Briefly, Kaplan posited that languages and cultures hold patterns of rhetorical organization

which may be specific to that language group or culture. English expository prose was analyzed as developing in a linear pattern with few digressions allowed from the central thesis. Romance, Oriental and Semitic languages, however, developed in different manners, each allowing certain types of digressions from the central point.

Although Kaplan's central notion has remained the same, his recent work in the area takes into account current composing process research:

> first, writing is a process and the teaching of writing needs to deal with the process in all of its complexity, and not merely with the product. . second, individuals from differing linguistic systems come to the writing process not only with differential control of the language and of the writing conventions but also with vastly differing presuppositions about both the process and the product (147).

Research in Contrastive Rhetoric from a product and process perspective has been presented and debated at the last seven TESOL conventions. An entire issue of the *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* (1982) has been devoted to this subject as well as numerous dissertation studies. Despite continued work in the area, however, conclusive results have not been obtained. Techniques for measuring rhetorical pattern differences are not adequate and differ widely across studies, making comparisons difficult. Perhaps intensive work in L1 and L2 composing processes may reveal new insight in rhetorical structure and other macrostructure concerns in L2 writing.

There exists a large body of literature discussing pedagogical consideration of ESL writing. Most of these in the past have stressed either controlled or free composition with little attention given to theory. This has been criticized by researchers (Taylor, 1981; Raimes, 1983; McKay, 1984). Indeed, as Zamel (1976, 1982), Raimes (1983) and Krashen (1984) note, very little process-oriented research of ESL composers has taken place. Zamel's 1982 and 1983 studies are pioneering investigations in this area.

In her 1983 study of six advanced ESL students, Zamel found many similarities between L1 and L2 composers. However, her research objectives were specifically directed toward finding similarities between ESL and native English speaking writers. Zamel did not indicate in her findings if differences also existed.

Through observations Zamel made of the students while composing and through informal discussions with the students,

she felt that the writers "understood that composing involves the constant interplay of thinking, writing and rewriting" and that their writing consistently appeared recursive and generative (1983:172). Pre-planning in the form of notes or lists was important for the writers. While composing, frequent pauses occurred to review generated text against intended meaning. Most revision work of the skilled writers was global, and they paid attention to meaning and intent while reserving surface level revisions for the end of the process. The least skilled writer, though, attended to smaller problems of changing words or phrases earlier during the process.

These observations were similar to Perl's (1980) L1 findings that good writers were more concerned with meaning while poor writers were often preoccupied with surface concerns. Zamel's skilled students did not appear overly concerned with linguistic problems. They used strategies to overcome difficulties in lexicon and syntax and used dictionaries toward the end to correct their errors. The least skilled writer did not possess these strategies.

Although Zamel's study helps bridge the gap between L1 and L2 composing process research, care should be taken in generalizing her findings to all ESL writers. First, Zamel's subjects were quite advanced and it is possible that the characteristic composing processes of her skilled writers were directly related to their level of acquisition of English. Since the subjects' level in English was not assessed, it is difficult to know if her one unskilled writer lacked fundamental skills in English that the other writers might have possessed. Secondly, since the subjects' L1 writing ability was not evaluated, it is likewise difficult to determine if writing skill in the L1 was important in indicating L2 writing skill.

Recent work by Raimes (1985a, 1985b) shows some patterns in ESL writing processes, but according to Raimes, no clear profile of a skilled or unskilled ESL writer has emerged. Common behavior by the subjects in her two studies include extensive rehearsing and limited editing, findings differing greatly from Zamel's L2 studies and Perl's L1 study. In one study with two levels of ESL subjects, higher level students wrote more frequently, revised more and rehearsed more frequently than lower-level students. However, even lower-level writers edited less and weren't concerned with small revisions as much as in Perl's study. Interestingly, a wide range of language proficiency scores in English did not correspond to major differences in writing quality. Since Raimes also has not looked at L1

composing of her subjects, it is unknown if L2 writing skills and quality correspond to writing skills in the L1.

The Relationship Between First Language and Second Language Composing

One published study has looked at the interaction of L1 and L2 in composing with child subjects. Edelsky (1982) looked at first, second and third graders in a bilingual program stressing writing. In her study she found that all aspects of the writing process were applied in writing in the L2.

> what a young writer knows about writing in the first language forms the basis of new hypotheses rather than interferes with writing in another language. . . . [this] can mean anything from tacit to explicit knowledge of local conventions, . . . to knowledge that written texts have different requirements than oral ones, to knowledge of what processes and strategies are used during writing. Application of such knowledge can appear as either surface similarities or differences when one compares texts in two languages written by the same child (227).

Edelsky concluded that several factors played important roles in the application of the writing processes, strategies, and higher level knowledge in writing in the second language: the two writing systems, the children's literacy experiences, their level of L2 proficiency, sociolinguistic constraints, and the writing process itself. To this we might add Bracewell's (1982) discussion on metacognition in applying oral communication skills to a written context. Similarly, Widdowson (1983) has noted that L2 writers need to apply their knowledge of the L1 discourse process to the new L2 context through linguistic rules of English. This can be especially difficult if L2 writers do not come from literate societies or are not familiar with the medium through which we write in English (1985).

Finally, a few studies, recently completed or still in progress, are looking at aspects of the writing process in the L1 and L2 of adult subjects. Friedlander (1988) examined the effects of the L1 on the L2 composing of twenty-nine native Chinese speaking adults. Findings indicate that his subjects planned more and wrote better when planning was kept in the language of acquisition of knowledge for a specific task, whether or not that language was actually used in writing the final essay product. However, interrupting this planning process by switching into another language negatively affected the essay. This can be explained

through the limited capacity of STM which is used in translating as well as retrieving topical knowledge.

Another important aspect of composing, revision, is being examined by Gaskill (1985). His study is analyzing revision of native Spanish speakers writing in both Spanish and English. One preliminary finding concurs with Raimes (1985) in that low-level ESL writers do not make extensive superficial revisions as native unskilled English writers seem to do. However, Gaskill's data reveal that few macrostructures or organizational changes are made by any of his subjects. This may be due to the difficulty of keeping so much in mind while revising. Preliminary findings from Cook (1985) indicate that subjects who are better writers in their L1 also write better in their L2, regardless of subjects' similar TOEFL scores. My own case study of one adult composer writing on a variety of written tasks shows that overall composing processes and high-level goal creation transfer well from the first to second language. Preliminary findings also indicate that familiarity and practice of the writing experience - both content and form - in a specific language have a positive effect on this subject's ability to establish and attain goals in writing tasks of that language (Moragne e Silva, 1986).

Is the process of composing in a second language similar to composing in the first language? Given the current data in L1 and L2 composing processes, this cannot be answered with any certainty. As Raimes has recognized (1985a), a single profile of an L2 composer has not yet been identified. Similarly, a specific L2 composing process has not been revealed. However, certain characteristics are emerging which may or may not be confirmed through subsequent studies. In general, studies of child and adult composers show a high transfer of composing skills from the L1 into L2 composing. Apparently, many skilled L1 writers become skilled L2 writers despite less linguistic proficiency in the L2.

It is clear, however, that research in the composing process of native English speakers writing in English is not always generalizable to non-native English writers. What is not yet clear is if differences between native and non-native writers can be attributed to additional variables of writing in a second language, or if composing processes and characteristics of skilled writers actually differ across languages and cultures. Despite similarities that do exist between writing in a first and second language, writing in a second language increases the complexity of the first language writing process. It is this increased complexity in second

language composing that deserves additional attention of researchers.

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